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## DPI ignores failures in State of Education Address

MADISON, Wis. – Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Superintendent Tony Evers commended his agency Thursday during the annual State of Education Address at the Capitol and praised an initiative aimed at making students college and career ready.

However, the statistics don't match the rhetoric.

Only 36.6 percent of students across the state are proficient or better at reading, according to a DPI database. That's a mere improvement of 2 percent since 2005, when 34.6 percent of pupils were considered proficient or better at reading.

In Milwaukee Public Schools, the state's largest school district, about 15 percent of students scored proficient in reading on the fall 2013 state assessments. Among the state's black students, only 14 percent scored at least proficient in reading.

Evers also lauded the state's graduation rate, but Wisconsin is one of nine states that saw a decrease in the percentage change of high school graduates from 2003-04 to 2013-14.

In Milwaukee, the graduation rate in 2013-14 was only 60.9 percent for all students and 58.3 percent for black pupils. Four years earlier, those graduation rates were slightly higher.

Although 79.2 percent of high schoolers in the Madison Metropolitan School District graduated in 2013-14, there is still a huge racial gap in Wisconsin's capital city. The graduation rate in Madison for black students was 55.8 percent that same school year.

While DPI has been quick to blame the state Legislature for its continued shortcomings – citing a lack of funding – the money distributed to each student in public schools has been increasing over the years. Wisconsin paid \$11,337 per public school pupil in 2013-14, an increase of more than \$2,300 per student since 2002-03. Yet despite this increase, student achievement remains relatively stagnant.

Sanfelippo is planning to introduce a series of bills this fall session that would decentralize power by shrinking the size of DPI and giving that money directly to local schools through per pupil aid. DPI paid out \$36.6 million in salaries and benefits to 415 administrative employees in 2014-15, according to the state Legislative Fiscal Bureau. DPI also spent more than \$140 million on operational costs and programs that same school year.

"Imagine how much better off our students – our future workforce – would be if we eliminated the excessive overhead at DPI and put that funding directly into the classrooms," Sanfelippo said. "We'd be able to shift more money to the local school districts, who know the needs of their students and teachers the best."

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